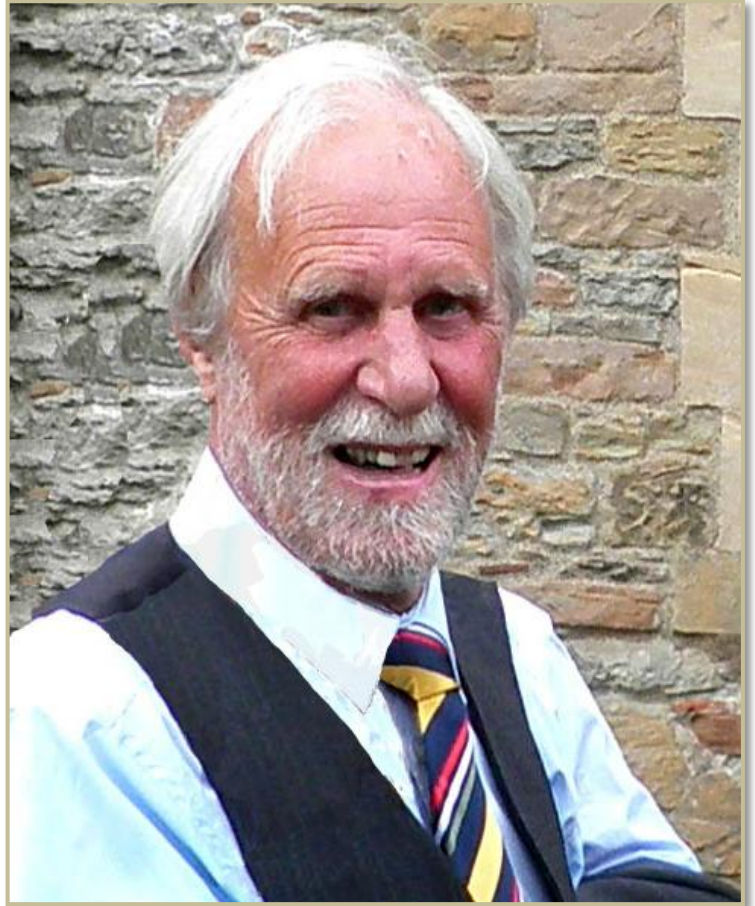


# Philip R Baxter RIP

The Choir is deeply saddened today, to hear the news of the death of one of our most esteemed members, Philip Baxter.

Philip has been a most loyal and stalwart member of Colne Valley Male Voice Choir for 47 years. Whilst his passing was not unexpected, we are all of us feeling a strong sense of loss to hear that the illness which so weakened him in recent weeks, on Saturday evening, ended the life of a valued colleague and friend.

Philip's association with the Choir is both long in years - he joined the Choir as a baritone in 1969 - and of the highest quality. His participation took many forms and we, despite our sadness, should celebrate the many ways he contributed to our musical brotherhood and to our many successes.



## Keith Swallow's Right Hand Man



In rehearsal at Keswick's Theatre on the Lake, 2008

To call Philip a **page-turner** is to underestimate his contribution as assistant to maestro, Keith Swallow. This is no small role. Philip ensured for many years that scores were accessible and ready, enabling Keith to focus on the finest quality of accompaniment that the Choir and our audiences, in concert and competition, has enjoyed for so many years.





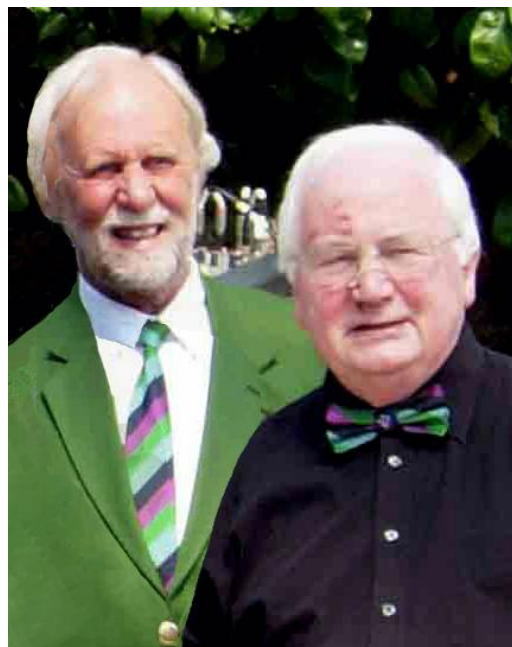
Christmas 2015 - Philip again takes care of business at Keith's side at last year's Town Hall Concert.



and at Chris Pulley's side, too



With Keith in Cornwall, 2015



and 2009



## Rehearsal Pianist and Accompanist

On a regular basis Philip accompanied the Choir in rehearsals, supporting Thom in vocal exercises and warm-ups. All of us recall, as we began to gather in our rehearsal room in Slaithwaite, how jazz improvisations from Philip would both entertain us and get us in the mood for the music to come.

And as deputy, Philip would often be called on to provide the piano support. When, for whatever reason Keith could not be around, Philip always made sure he was and our rehearsals could prosper.

And it was not just in rehearsal that Philip could be relied on to back the choir at the keyboard. Many a time - and often at short notice - Philip would step in and rise to the occasion to play for the Choir in concerts with reassuringly great skill and verve.

One of the most enjoyable fixtures in the life of the Choir in recent years have been the 'Schools Tours' to promote boys' singing in primary schools across the district. Without Philip, often coping with slightly 'dodgy' pianos, these could not have been the successes and the pleasure they have proved to be.



Dozens of our local schools and hundreds of our local kids have had their musical lives enriched by these events (and Philip's many other contributions to school music over the years). They and our Colne Valley Boys Choir have much to be grateful for from Philip's contribution.

## Rehearsal Conductor

As our rehearsal conductor, Philip was the one the Choir could always call on to take us through our paces. By arrangement - and frequently in emergencies – he would take us through what he modestly referred to as 'note-bashing' but was much more than that. He had a clear set of ideas on performance but was always careful not to 'tread on Thom's toes'. Philip was a man of great loyalty. His was not a grand ego: a huge talent quietly set behind a modest and good-humoured manner.

And it was not unknown for Philip to find himself thrust into the limelight when the unexpected happened.



## 2011 - A Competition – And No Thom to Lead Us.

We were in Whitby for a weekend in April to compete in the Eskdale Music Festival, assembling around the Pavilion when news came through that Thom had been taken ill and could not be there. "What to do?" was on every ones' lips. Keith Swallow and our rehearsal accompanist, **Philip Baxter**, were there and after a brief discussion the committee concluded that we would carry on and that Philip would take the baton. 'War Trumpet', an exacting piece was substituted, preventing us being judged in the male voice class but we went on to win three firsts & a second prize on the day. We were all delighted but none more so than Philip.

## 'Trouble Over Bridgewater'

Thom had been in a car crash and we were performing the next night at Poulton le Fylde.

Do we cancel? No way!

We called on Philip and of course he didn't let us down.

A quick rehearsal -including Philip's entertainingly misnamed, '**Bridge over Troubled Water**' and we were on stage. We were happy. The audience were happy. We're booked to go back in 2017.



## A Fine Pianist and Singer in his Own Right



For years Philip sang with the baritones and then in 1979 moved across to the basses.

(See him here on the left, though with the Choir and the Whitburn Band in 2001)

But it was as a pianist that he will be mainly remembered. For the Choir and at many an event outside, Philip would set his fingers to a wide range of music and musical styles.

In concerts Philip would fill a solo spot to the delight of our audiences or play a solo section in vocal solos, for example in backing Thom, singing, **'Georgia on my Mind'**. Many will remember his concert duets with Keith and with Rodney Pearson.

## Committee Member and Vice President

Philip also played a substantial role in the Choir's management and development. This contribution was recognised in 2010 when he was made one of the Choir's Vice Presidents - the highest honour the Choir can convey on a member. As a key member of our Music Committee, Philip helped in planning and selecting the repertoire.

In concert and particularly in competition, it is the choice of repertoire that has proved the determining factor in the Choir continuing auditorium and Festival successes and Philip's contribution here, too, will be greatly missed.

### Thom Meredith had this to say:



*"As a choir we are all deeply saddened to hear that Philip passed away on Saturday night. He was a character known by everyone and one who gave such valuable service in so many capacities. As singer, as accompanist, as committee member, as arranger, as right hand man to Keith and as conductor both at rehearsals and sometimes at concerts and competitions, Philip was that rarest of talents: someone who would step up to the mark no matter what was asked. He was someone who would simply say: 'Yes, I'll do that for the choir.', and would then do the best job that he possibly could - on every occasion.*

*I will miss his helpful contributions and his willingness to do whatever was needed. I suppose, with a heavy heart, we all have to move on in situations such as these, but whenever I look to my left at rehearsals, there will always be fond memories of Philip."*

## Arranger

As an arranger, too, his contribution to the Choir's repertoire has been significant. The 2016 Christmas Concert at the Town Hall again featured his transcription of the Matthias piece, "**Sir Christémas**".

His arrangement of, "**You'll Never Walk Alone**" has been a standard of our summer repertoire for many years.

And just this summer, Philip's new arrangement of "**At the End of the Day**" provided moving moments at the Scarborough Festival

So, his contributions are many and he will be deeply missed by the Choir.

## Family Man

Our thoughts go out to his family, to wife, Jo and children, Katy, Georgie and Sophie and with Philip's first granddaughter, Aubrey, born just in February. And also to brother, Stuart and sister-in-law and Choir secretary, Jenny.



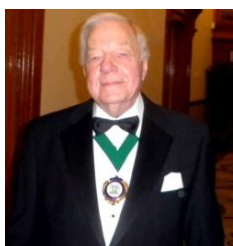
Philip, no doubt proud of all his children, was pleased to invite Choir members to support daughter, Sophie, in her fund-raising efforts on a charity climb of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Then a few weeks ago, 'climbing his own 'mountain,' Philip was doubly proud to walk her down the aisle for her marriage ceremony.



**Philip's wife, Jo writes,** "*I think this article captures his complete commitment and love of the Choir. Philip would be absolutely overwhelmed and amazed and also as proud as punch.*"

*Please could you pass on our heartfelt thanks to the Choir for all their support over the difficult last months. He really appreciated the visits and good wishes sent to us"*



**Choir Chairman, Peter Denby, adds,** "I have read this *VotV* obituary for Phillip very carefully. I am happy for our members and friends to receive the sad news in this format. In my opinion it quite beautifully reflects the lifetime of service given by Phillip to our great choir and the help and inspiration he gave to all of us."

Choir members and his many friends connected with the Choir and from elsewhere will want to participate in the funeral service alongside and in support of his family. The service details are not yet clear but the Choir will be in touch shortly and the details will also be available on the website.

